

Jane, Pt. 2 by EvieSmallwood

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Summary:

Love is a funny old thing.

Jane, Pt. 2

—*I Love You*—

They're on the floor in her bedroom, sorting through all of her belongings—deciding what to keep and what to throw away.

If this had been a couple of years ago, there wouldn't be much indecision; back then, the walls had been bare, the drawers almost empty, and the underneath of her bed spotless. Now, after all of her tutoring and the frequent visiting of her friends (in which they almost always bring *something*), it's a cluttered mess.

El rifles through a stack of English papers, watching as her handwriting goes from neat and established to messy and crooked, and feels herself smile. *Progress*.

“Is that the Star Wars essay?”

El glances up at Mike, who's leaning over to look with her. She can barely see his expression, given the sunlight pouring through the window. It shadows him.

“Yeah,” she passes it over, happy to get rid of it; the paper is crumpled and ripped in places, and the whole thing looks like it was written by a seven year old. It's hard to believe she'd only finished it last year.

“Can I keep this?”

El's gaze snaps up from the new stack of papers she'd grabbed. “You want to keep it?”

“Well, yeah,” he swallows, and looks down at the essay again, fondness seeping into his features. She sees the beginnings of a smile; lips quirking upward, eyes crinkling. “I mean, it's the first one we worked on together, y'know? I was...” he bites his lip. “I was super proud.”

She raises her eyebrows in the way that Max does when one of the boys says something a little unexpected. “It’s just an essay.”

“No, yeah,” he nods, cheeks flushing, and sets it into the throw-away pile. “I’m still proud, though. I mean, you’ve come really far.”

El watches him for another moment. She doesn’t particularly understand why he wants it; he always throws out his homework when he’s done with it, unless it’s important. All of the boys do. Regardless, she shrugs. “You can have it if you want. It’s okay.” She pauses, remembering Hopper’s countless lessons. *Manners*. “And thank you.”

Mike smiles for real. He eagerly folds up the paper and tucks it into his back pocket. They keep on working. El decides to throw out all of her math work pages, but keeps her formula sheet and notes, just in case. Not like she ever really forgets.

“Wanna take a break?”

El nods. She tries to stand but fails. Her legs feel weak from being folded up beneath her. Mike holds out a hand and helps her up.

They’re very close, but he’s a lot taller than her, now. Their proximity is magnetising, in some way she’ll never understand, but she’s just too tired to make a move. So they hover for a minute, instead, and with the way he’s looking at her it’s almost as good as a kiss.

Until she lets herself plop back onto her bed. The mattress bounces beneath her. Mike grins. “I’ll go make something to eat.”

He slips out, leaving her alone. El lays back and stares at her ceiling, coiling a curl around her finger.

She’s been living in this room, in this cabin, for over three years. So many days she’d lost track (or maybe she just hadn’t felt the need to count anymore). It was home. One of her many homes.

But like Hop always said, home was people, not places.

She had learned to love it and learned to hate it. For a while those opposites had been doses of equal measure. Now, with the pictures of

her friends on the wall, and the little jewellery box Hopper had made her, and the *Back To The Future* poster she'd been given by Dustin... it's harder to let go of.

Where they're going—Hopper's childhood home smack dab in the middle of the suburbs, about two minutes from Max's and five from Dustin's places—it's new. The walls are covered in fresh paper, with little paisley patterns. There's a whole kitchen, a table that seats four, and two separate bathrooms.

It's perfect for them. But it's not the same as the rickety, creaking, run down home they made for themselves in the back woods. If there's one thing El knows now, it's that it hadn't been just her rebuilding out here. He'd been starting fresh, too.

Now they're starting again, only the place isn't filled with cobwebs and spiders. There are still things, though; echoes of Hopper's past. She can see the memories on his face whenever he walks into that house, just like here.

El swallows. There's a part of her, and it's maybe been there since the first time she'd stepped foot in the house, that wishes she could just live with Will, and Joyce. Hop, too, of course. She wishes they would just grow up and admit they're in love. Adults are supposed to be *mature*.

“Ah, shit!”

El bolts up, listening as something clatters to the floor and Mike hisses in pain. She's running out of her room and into the kitchen before he can say anything else.

There's blood pooling in the palm of his hand, and a knife on the ground.

“Mike—”

“It's fine!” He bends over and scoops up the utensil, dropping it into the sink. “I just cut myself. It's okay.”

She takes his hand. With a flick of her wrist the faucet turns on. She washes away the blood, watching the pink-tinged water circle the

drain and disappear.

The cut doesn't look bad, but Hop has warned her so many times about infections she can't help but feel a little paranoid.

Mike seems to sense her anxiety. With his good hand, he turns the water off. "It's not deep," he says. "I'm okay, El. Really."

"Let me bandage it." She means for it to sound firmer, but it comes out as more of a plea.

Mike nods. "Yeah. Sure."

They settle at the table; her, with a roll of gauze, and him resting his cut hand on his arm. It's still bleeding a little, but not too bad. She dabs that away with a wet rag and sets to work.

"I guess I'll have a scar to match Nancy's, now," he says, watching as she starts to wrap the wound.

"Maybe," she agrees. "But not all cuts leave scars."

She'd learned that when she'd sliced her calf on a tree branch. The wound had healed and faded with time. Now there's no mark.

"Jane."

El's head snaps up. Her eyes are wide. He never calls her Jane, not ever. She remembers the first time he'd learned her name, and it feels like forever ago. His face had been inches from her own like now. She'd blurted it.

"Yeah?"

It's serious, and they both know it. He grips her hand even if she's not done wrapping his own and then takes her other. Even that is still enough to get her heart racing. *Touch.*

"I love you."

He's never said it before. Not once in the years that she's known him (that he's been her whole gravitational force). They've both felt it,

she's certain of that. But it's never been vocalised. That barrier has never been broken, until now.

And it's like suddenly the air is more fresh, and there's no more hesitation. There's no more wondering, *what if he doesn't*, and *what if he never tells me*.

"I love you, too."

His face goes from pale and nervous to flushed in an instant. He grins, squeezes her hands, and then winces. "Fuck."

She can't help but laugh. It helps, vaporising what little nerves she has.

Their eyes meet, and she thinks about what they've become when they started out with so little. A short conversation, an understanding, and a jacket.

She wraps the bandage around and tapes it, cold fingers brushing his. She's more happy to be his (his, El, Jane), than a number. Infinitely more so.

Author's Note:

So! This was fun. But also not how I wanted it to be, at all. It just sort of created itself when I was trying to write the first part, and I thought I might as well post it. If you liked it, let me know. Thank you for reading!